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TITLE: Youth Advocacy and Outreach-Chicagoland Youth Against AIDS

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ISSUE: The Chicago Department of Public Health has estimated that over 900 youth within the city are infected with HIV. Adult providers were not reaching youth with their HIV prevention strategies. A growing number of youth in Chicago continue to be infected with HIV. Due to the negative stigma of HIV among the general peer population advocacy for HIV positive youth is important and necessary. Peer Health Educators want to speak on behalf of HIV positive youth about issues of health care, medications, medical providers and social support systems. This advocacy is directed toward health care providers, state legislators, school systems, and to the general public.

SETTING: Youth in and around the Chicago metropolitan area who are peer health educators, and patients of the adolescent clinic at Cook County Hospital (HIV positive and negative youth) ages 13-24 came together to form a youth organization in 1994. The organization became known as Chicagoland Youth Against AIDS (CYAA). Its intended audience includes youth, health care providers, state legislators, the school system, and board of directors of youth service agencies.

PROJECT: To address the issues, CYAN implemented 1) Outreach and *Prevention: to go out* and speak daily to youth at schools on safer sex and HIV prevention; 2) Advocacy: to show the impact of HIV infection among adolescents and young adults to state legislators, health care providers, medical students, and educators; 3) Buddy *System*: one on one support to help bring HIV infected youth into care; and 4) *Media: to address* a larger number of adolescents and adults etc.

RESULTS: For the time period of 1/98 to 12/98 we have conducted the following activities: Education and *Prevention/16* activities to 85 youths and 362 adults, *Advocacy: activities* involved prevention to 15 youth and 145 adults at local and national conferences. Ruddy System for HIV positive youth: to 8 HIV positive youth. 4) *Media*: where 5 videos. 2 magazine interviews were produced for mass distribution.

LESSONS LEARNED: It is effective to have youth teach youth about HIV infection:

- Youth will use prevention skills given to them by other youth to protect themselves from HIV and other STDs.
- Youth representing youth conducting roleplaying with health care providers makes providers more sensitive toward youth issues.
- Some HIV infected youth feel ashamed about their status, however when they serve to advocate for other youth, it instills in them a sense of self-respect.
- It is significant to remember that HIV affects everyone regardless of age, gender, race, and sexual orientation.

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